

Who Gets What? (Matt 22:15-22)

Have you notice how much people are asking of you? I think the demand of how much we give of ourselves with our time and money has increased dramatically over that last ten years. There is a lot being asked of you. If you have children (of all ages) they want your full attention, at least most of the time. Your spouse deserves your loyalty and attention. The boss wants your full effort at work, even after you were up late the night before watching the bear's game. If you're in school the teachers want your full attention. Your friends demand your attention when you're with them (Walter W Harms).

Everyone's always asking or needing something from you. "I need your help with this..." "Can you do this for me..." "I need money for..." "Give me this," "buy me that," "I need this." Then our culture puts pressure on you telling you that you need "better cloths," "you need to eat more," "you need a better car," "you need a flasher house in a better neighborhood," and it goes on and on (Harms).

Who gets our time? Who gets our attention? Who gets what?

In his answer to the conniving disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians, Jesus gives us the answer. It is those famous words, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

I think it will be helpful if we look at what was going on and what the political situation was during Jesus' time. It is because of this situation that the question of "who gets what?" was brought to Jesus.

We need to look back to 63 B.C., when the Rome took control of the Jewish homeland. Rome ruled through emperors, kings (such as Herod and his sons) and Roman governors. In the first century Jews paid several taxes, tithes to the temple, customs tax, taxes on land. Jesus' opponents were not questioning taxes in General, but their question was more specific, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?"

The tax that is in question is believed to be the "census" tax and every adult had to pay it. It was about a denarius, which was about a days wage. You had some people that were collaborating with the Roman rule and endorsed the tax. There were others who resisted the Roman authority and rejected it. There's the reason for the tension and why they came to Jesus to question him.

Even though the Pharisees and the Herodians teamed up, there was a conflict between the two groups. The Pharisees felt that paying the census tax was a religious hypocrisy. The Herodians benefited from the tax and fully supported it. They put their differences aside due to their strong dislike of Jesus and by corroborating they could trap Jesus. If he answers God it would be treason against Rome. If he answered emperor it would be blasphemy against God. They had him either way. They even tried to use flattery to drop his guard, "Teacher you're the best, you don't care about anyone's status or position." They were daring Jesus to speak up and tell everyone what he really thought about the Romans.

You got too handed to Jesus, he's so cleaver and quick. He sees right through them and calls them out by asking them for a coin. They pull a coin out of their pocket, a Roman coin and the Roman tax could only be paid with Roman money. The reason Jesus asked for a coin is because on it was an image of Caesar and on the other side there was

an inscription, "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, high priest." Remember for the Jews this graven image was prohibited because it went against the commandments give by God. They did not bow down to any other divine being, but God only. Yet, not all coins in that area had images of Caesar or other graven images out of respect for the Jewish law. Many devout Jews avoided using coins with images. So, by getting a coin with a graven image from his challengers Jesus showed that the Pharisees disciples, keepers of the Jewish law, were hypocrites.

Then Jesus gives them their answer, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and Give to God what is God's." Who gets what? Caesar gets what is his. God gets what is His. Neither one is neglected or devalued. Neither one is put down as unworthy. One is not rated as superior to the other. Both have legitimate claim on our lives, hearts, money, and time! (Harms)

There is a phrase that has been present in our culture for years that echoes Jesus' answer, it is a phrase that has caused a lot of controversy in the United States: "separation of church and state."... John Payne claims, "It's obvious that Americans, including American Christians, have not done very well at sorting out between church and state, between sacred and secular - between what is the emperor's and what is God's. The problem in sorting out what is the emperor's and what is God's is that we can't."

The Question given to Jesus is still with us today. How do we make decisions about Caesar and God, church and state, things spiritual and things temporal in a world that is involved in every aspect of life? Who Gets What?

Jesus' words had little to do with taxation or political authority. Unfortunately this passage does not give biblical support for not paying your taxes. As citizens of this Country we have to give to the government what's theirs, we have to pay our taxes.

I think John Payne makes a good point, it is difficult for us to separate we can't separate church and state, what is the emperors and what is God's. Our lives can't be separated into different sections. We can't have a work life, political life, social life, and a religious life. We can't drop our Christianity at the door. We have to live our faith in every aspect of our lives, which we well know it not always easy to do. "Give to God what is God's." Who gets what?

Jesus gives his ultimate answer to the Pharisees by giving two commandments only a few paragraphs ahead of our reading in Matthew. "Love your God with all heart, and soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus commanded us to love God with whole self and to love our neighbor. That means it takes our whole self to worship God and it takes no less of our self to love our neighbor.

The passage that motivates me to follow Christ command is in Genesis, "human beings were created in the image of God." We see that image most vibrantly in our neighbor, but often it is not seen due to the individualistic culture we live in. I need this, or I need that. I want this and that. Unfortunately, for some people their sense of community comes second to their concern for their individuality.

This past Wednesday we had a group go to Community Social Services (formally known as St. Barts) in Waukegan and serve food to men, women, and child who were hungry and cold. That's one thing we do to love our neighbors, but there are others who are in need. We have individuals call or come by the church in need of money to buy food, diapers, or medicine, or to pay the electric bill. That's one thing we do to love our neighbors who are in need. We support the ministries of Open Door and Fellowship

Housing. That's one thing we do to love our neighbors. We give regularly to World Compassion who help people all over the world who are suffering from disasters. That's one thing we do to love our neighbors. Yet, there are more people suffering all over the world, there are more people who are hungry, there are more people who are in need. Then there are those who sit comfortably in a warm home eating plenty of food and are surrounded by many luxuries.

Beneath all of this lies the question, "what is God's and what is Caesar's." The question we ask our self, when we vote in the political election next month and when we decide what to give as a steward of the church is identical. How is my life, what I give, what I do, an example of loving God and loving my neighbor.

We are blessed to live in a country that is devoted to our rights, personal rights, economic rights, property rights, and religious rights. We wouldn't want to give up any of these. We are also blessed to be children of God, we are blessed to be a part of the Body of Christ, we are blessed to be a part of loving faith community. We can't cherish our own rights so much that we deny the needs of our neighbor.

So "what is Caesar's and what is God's?" There is really only one answer to that question; it's all God's anyway.

Who gets what? God gets everything. All that we are, all that we do is for the glory of God. We have to give our whole self to God and devote ourselves, our heart, mind, and soul to loving God and loving our neighbor. We have to give ourselves to God. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and Give to God what is God's."